FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA

GRAO EN LINGUA E LITERATURA INGLESAS

The girl who despised being called a "girl": Scout Finch and the issue of gender in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Autora: Uxía García Ramallal

Titor: José Manuel Barbeito Varela

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Resumo [na lingua en que se vai redactar o TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]:

Told through the eyes of the rebellius and witty Jean Louis Finch (nicknamed Scout), *To Kill a Mockingbird* develops the coming-of-age journey of this six-year-old girl who lives in the fictional town of Maycomb (Alabama) with her elder brother Jem and their father Atticus, an honorable attorney who struggles to prove the innocence of a black man unfairly accused of raping a young white woman (Mayella Ewell), while at the same time confronting racial prejudices and taking care of his children with the help of Calpurnia, the black housekeeper.

Most scholars have centered their attention on the novel's racial, legal and ethical themes. However, Scout's defiance of the conventional gender stereotypes within the prejudicial Maycomb's society deserves further in-depth examination. Robert Mulligan's 1962 film adaptation can help in this. This project will consit of a comparative analysis between the main female characters of Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and Robert Mulligan's film adaptation (1962), focusing on Scout Finch, Calpurnia, and Mayella Ewell and on the social and racial aspects that separate the three of them.

The aims of this research will be, firstly, to shed light on the potential difficulties that arise when adapting literary works to film, and secondly, to understand what being a woman in a man's world entailed, according to Lee, in the context of Southern patriarchal society in the USA during the years of the Great Depression (1930s).

Gender inequality should not be studied as exclusively dependent on sex. My work will include a critical overview of those factors such as race and social status that may interact with gender as a ground for

SRA. DECANA DA FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA (Presidenta da Comisión de Títulos de Grao)

discrimination.

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INTRODUCTION

The first time one finishes reading Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), one cannot help but think about how great a character Atticus Finch is. He teaches us an essential and unforgettable lesson in terms of justice, morality, and even fatherhood. In fact, most critics and scholars seem to share this same idea. Critical essays, theories, analyses, or reviews focus on the issue of racism mainly through Atticus's defence of Tom Robinson. The trial of this black man is also the central element around which Robert Mulligan's 1962 film adaptation revolves. It is indeed a crucial point in the novel, but there is something missing this account. What about Scout? Was not our young heroine supposed to be the protagonist?

This is not Atticus's story, but Scout's. She, like the rest of female characters, deserves further examination and this must be carried out paying attention to gender issues. In this TFG I will perform a comparative analysis between three of the main female characters of Lee's novel and Robert Mulligan's film, focusing on Scout Finch, Calpurnia, and Mayella Ewell and on the social and racial aspects that separate them.

Once I have compared Lee's novel and its film version, my first aim will be to shed some light on the potential difficulties that arise in the process of adaptation. My second aim will be to understand what being a woman in a man's world entailed, from Lee's perspective, in the context of Southern 1930s patriarchal society in the USA.

Even though novels and film adaptations have often been analysed on the basis of fidelity, this does not mean that it is the only or necessarily the best approach. By comparing some of the elements of Lee's novel and Mulligan's film version we will see what are the limitations that hinder the process of conversion from one medium to the

other, and what alternative approaches to fidelity ought to be taken into account when doing so.

Written in the mid-1950s and published in 1960, *To Kill a Mockingbird* encompasses and touches on numerous historical events that turned out to be decisive for the progress of the American nation and for its transformation into what it is today. The war between Unionists and Confederates, the abolition of slavery and the Great Depression of the 1930s were just some of the numerous episodes that marked a milestone in the history of America and which brought about a series of consequences that would affect the American population not only in real life, but also in fiction, as in the case of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the fictional town of Maycomb.

By the time the novel was published and its film adaptation released (1962), the civil rights movement had already begun. However, given that Scout's story is set in the 1930s, the struggle of African Americans to bring segregation and racial discrimination to an end was not part of Lee's novel. Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to the context and to the temporal distance between the plot time and the author's time in order to study the effects of the changes that took place between these two periods (1930s – 1960s).

Once the main historical and social aspects of the 1930s have been accounted for, it will be easier to understand what it meant to be a woman in a male-dominated world. Although apparently different, Scout, Calpurnia and Mayella, three of the most relevant female characters of the story, are essentially the same; three women united by a single cause.

Through the use of the theoretical framework and perspective of intersectionality, a term coined in the late 1980s by Kimberlé Crenshaw, I will tackle the multiple ways in which they experience discrimination mainly on the grounds of sex, class and race.

Finally, after a brief summary I will draw some conclusions with regard to the different sections of the research, setting forth the possible difficulties that I may have found when writing the TFG.

1. ADAPTING LITERARY WORKS TO FILM

There have been many attempts to develop a theory that could explain the process of adaptation from one medium (the linguistic) to another (the visual), and yet no consensual nor decisive solution has been reached thus far.

An adaptation is neither a copy nor a reproduction, for "[j]ust as there is no such thing as a literal translation, there can be no literal adaptation" (Hutcheon 16). Adaptation is at the same time an interpretation and a recreation of the source text in a new medium, and "it involves both memory and change, persistence and variation" (Hutcheon 173).

The OED defines adaptation as "an altered or amended version of a text, musical composition, etc., (now *esp.*) one adapted for filming, broadcasting, or production on the stage from a novel or similar literary source." ("adaptation, n.") On the basis of this definition, the biggest challenge is deciding how, to what extent, and why the original source has been "altered".

FIDELITY. IS IT POSSIBLE?

The adaptation of novels into films has been for a long time judged, mainly, according to the idea of fidelity. The problem is that novel and film do not belong to the same medium and cannot be analysed in the same way. Just as we cannot analyse a novel and a song (or

rather, its score) as if they were alike, neither can we compare a novel and a film as if they shared the same features. The American film critic Andrew Sarris stated that the main difference between literature and film was that "[l]iterature is what you read from a printed page, and film is what you see, hear and even read on the screen" (13). Although this is an obvious distinction, it is often overlooked when discussing fidelity.

If we take this into account, it cannot be argued that a film is good or bad because it is more or less faithful to the novel it is based on. We can consider certain films better than others, and the same happens with books, but "[i]f a film is considered "better" or "worse" than the novel, the comparison, strictly speaking, is made between that film and *other films*" (Bluestone, "Word to Image" 175). Otherwise, it would not make sense, for we would be obviating the particular and specific demands of the two different genres and media. Once we acknowledge the distinctive features, "[t]he reconstructed judgement may then read: *A* is better as a film than *B* is as a novel. *A* cannot be directly compared with *B* because the scales of judgement are different" (Bluestone, "Word to Image" 175).

Rather than fidelity, what film critics are concerned with is: "has the film been successful?" instead of "is the film faithful to the novel?". In the words of George Bluestone, "[w]henever a film becomes a financial or even a critical success, the question of "faithfulness" is given hardly any thought … The film makers are content with the assumption that they have mysteriously captured the "spirit" of the book. The issue goes no further" ("Word to Image" 180). As long as the film is a commercial success and the box-office receipts satisfactory, the question of fidelity or faithfulness ceases to be a problem. It will no longer matter whether the film is faithful to the novel or not; and what is more, in most cases, fidelity to the original will be taken for granted.

What does fidelity mean? What does it imply? According to James Harold, "[b]y 'fidelity' is meant the critical issue of the degree to which the film captures the significant

aspects of the original work" (90). Among these "significant aspects" we may list the story (including events and dialogue), the characters, and the themes.

Focusing first on faithfulness to the story, Robert Mulligan's 1962 film *To Kill a Mockingbird* could be considered a reasonably faithful adaptation of Harper Lee's homonymous novel. In both media the story itself and the events that Scout narrates[1] are part of her childhood, and the plot is nearly identical; the only exception are those scenes left out and added anew in the film, in most cases to replace what in the book would correspond with Scout's narrative voice and the descriptions and background information she provides.

Why can't the source text be preserved untouched? Apart from the obvious answer that novel and film belong to different media[2], and hence abide by different rules, condensation is required by length constraints. It is not viable to keep all the material of a 300-page-novel in a 2-hour-film. Some scenes must necessarily be omitted, although as Lester Asheim points out, "[t]he necessity to condense … dictates only that something must be eliminated, but does not prescribe what that something shall be" ("From Book to Film" 260).

Therefore, by paying attention to the medium's demands and characteristics we may catch a glimpse of those elements which are more likely to be lost or added in the transfer of the story to the film version. Considering that the film is predominantly visual,

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[1] The novel is narrated in first person by an adult Jean Louise Finch (Scout), who reminisces and reflects upon her childhood in the little town of Maycomb, Alabama. In the film, the narrator is adapted by means of the voice over, used six times in the film replacing the effect of Scout's storytelling and "function[ing] primarily to provide transitions and shifts in time and place" (Shackelford 104).

[2] "… changes are *inevitable* the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium. Finally, the end products of novel and film represent different aesthetic genera, as different from each other as ballet is from architecture" (Bluestone, "Word to Image" 174).

it seems logical that the scenes most often chosen are those involving some kind of action, and even more if the action is relevant to the plot.

Censorship, or rather, self-censorship, is another factor to consider. The Motion Picture Production Code, popularly known as the Hays Code owing to its creator Will H. Hays, stipulated an extensive set of guidelines aimed at the preservation of decorum and morality on the screen.[3] From 1930 to 1966, this code regulated and restricted the content of the films, limiting their language and themes (mainly those of a sexual or violent nature). On this basis, some troubling and disturbing aspects were suppressed, for "[t]he rules of the Production Code apply rigidly wherever questions of "taste" and delicacy arise" (Asheim, "From Book to Film" 268). This may explain why in the film there is nothing insinuating that Mayella could be suffering sexual abuse by her father, something that Tom Robinson suggests in the novel when he is being interrogated: "She reached up an' kissed me 'side of th' face. She says she never kissed a grown man before an' she might as well kiss a nigger. She says what her papa do to her don't count" (Lee 221).

As a form of mass entertainment and great allure, it is no wonder that the film industry must abide by some regulations. In view of their huge success and their appealing characteristics, "certain limitations are necessarily imposed on motion pictures. They must be moral; they must be easily understood; they must appeal to every taste; and they must be commercial" (Skouras 26).

In relation to inclusions, films tend to resort to strategies that aim at the exploitation of the camera's advantages (Asheim, "From Book to Film" 261) and at the transformation of the narrative elements into scenes and actions that can be played out by

[3] William Harrison Hays, (1879—1954) was the president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) from 1922 to 1945.

the actors. This is directly related to the distinction between showing and telling that I will talk about in the following section.

For example, in the film, from 44:17 to 47:38 we see Jem and Scout driving with Atticus to Helen Robinson's house. When they arrive, the kids stay in the car while their father goes inside to talk to Tom's wife. Scout is asleep and Jem is visibly terrified at the sight of Bob Ewell, who is drunk and approaches the car in a menacing way. Helen's son goes inside to warn Atticus and once he is by Jem's side, Bob Ewell mutters: "nigger lover". Atticus starts the car and they leave, getting away from the drunkard and ignoring the slanders. This episode never occurs in the novel. The introduction of this scene in the film highlights how evil and grotesque Bob Ewell is. In the novel, we are provided with some context and lengthy explanatory comments which contribute to our better understanding of the story and its characters, but in the film there is no possible way of doing that.

As regards characters, some additions have been made, such as Spence, Tom Robinson's father. Likewise, there are some important characters that have been removed from the film version. Among them, we count Miss Rachel (Dill's aunt), Miss Caroline (Scout's teacher), Aunt Alexandra, Uncle Jack, Francis Hancock (Aunt Alexandra's grandson) and Dolphus Raymond. Besides these minor variations, it is also remarkable that female characters in general have smaller roles in the film than in the novel. Scout, the protagonist in the book, is somehow displaced from her leading role by Atticus, who becomes the main focus of the movie; Calpurnia is barely a part of the film while in the novel she acts as the main unifying link between the two cultures (Blacks' and Whites');

and Aunt Alexandra does not even appear so that the whole issue of Scout's struggle with womanhood and growing up seems to fade into the background.[4]

The film is faithful to the novel's characterisation of personality, to the characters' behaviour, and to their looks. In fact, Harper Lee always thought Gregory Peck, the actor playing Atticus, to be the vivid image of his father (in whom Atticus' character was inspired). After a telephone interview with her, Michael Freedman wrote:

> I somehow expected there would be words of complaint. Few authors really like the way actors portray their characters. And Atticus Finch was no ordinary character. He was very firmly based on her beloved father. But from our first words together, it was plain that, to her, Peck was perfection personified ("I'm the only journalist").

As far as it concerns thematic fidelity, in the film the focus falls basically on Tom Robinson's trial and Atticus' defence.[5] Certainly, racism and justice are two of the major themes of the novel, but we should not forget that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is primarily Scout's coming-of-age story, and therefore, it does not deal exclusively with Tom Robinson's trial, but also with other issues such as class and social prejudices, gender, and the depiction of the Southern society. For instance, concerning gender, "[a]lthough it is clear in the film that Scout is a tomboy and that she will probably grow out of this stage in her life … , the film … does not make Scout's ambivalence about being a female in an adult male world clear enough" (Shackelford 109).

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[4] The only significant scene in the film adaptation dealing with the issue of gender and Scout's rejection of femininity takes place from the minute 32:37 to 34:54. Jem, Atticus, Miss Maudie and Calpurnia are waiting for Scout to appear in the kitchen with the dress she is going to wear on her first day of school. Her entrance in the kitchen, arouses different reactions: on the one hand, Jem laughs at her, and on the other, the adults flatter her. This scene, does not take place in the novel.

[5] The trial scene begins in the minute 1:09:21 and lasts until 1:43:27.

We have seen that fidelity is slightly ambiguous, and it is this ambiguity which renders it a pointless argument with respect to film adaptations. Nevertheless, this should not be a problem, since "[t]here are many kinds of relations which may exist between film and literature, and fidelity is only one—and rarely the most exciting" (McFarlane 11).

REDEFINING APPROACHES. INTERTEXTUALITY. SHOWING VS. TELLING.

Apropos the foregoing subject matter, questions may arise about whether adaptations are carried out assuming that the audience knows beforehand the source text or not. If the answer is no, then we may wonder: "Would this experience be the same … for the audience that knows the adapted text as it is for the one that does not?" (Hutcheon 120).

Familiarity with the source text may turn out to be a double-edged sword, for "knowing audiences have expectations—and demands" (Hutcheon 122). We tend to believe that any work of art consists of

> … a separable content that may be detached and reproduced, … that incidents and characters in a fiction are interchangeable with incidents and characters in its adaptation; that the novel is a norm and the film deviates at its peril; that deviations are permissible for vaguely defined reasons—probably exigencies of length or visualization—but that the extent of deviation will vary directly with the "respect" one has for the original; that … taking liberties is somehow a trick which must be concealed from the public. (Bluestone, "Word to Image" 174)

When acquainted with the original text, people tend to want its adaptation to correspond to the mental image of the setting and the characters that they create as they read the text. This is where the whole problem begins. According to Jenn Jellenik, "[t]he film adaptation of a novel produces two iterative texts with a single referent, the source" (254). Therefore, there are two texts (the film and the novel) and only one story. These

texts are interconnected, but we cannot expect them to be the same, because they are different interpretations of the original work. No matter how much we wish that it were so, "[n]o film could be faithful to its source in every respect because adaptations, by their nature, include departures (at a minimum, those necessary to the change of medium) from the source" (Harold 92).

The reader hopes that he can see recreated on the screen those characters and scenarios that he has formed in his mind, but when the novel in question is brought to the screen it is very unlikely that he does not end up feeling disappointed. The way in which he imagines the characters' world will probably differ in some way or another from the filmmaker's perception, which means that "the reader of the novel will not always find his film, since what he has before him in the actual film is now somebody else's phantasy" (Metz 112).

It is impossible to please everyone: "The film version of a novel may retain all the major cardinal functions of a novel, all its chief character functions, its most important psychological patterns, and yet, … set up in the viewer acquainted with the novel quite different responses" (McFarlane 26). This may lead to the possibility that the film adaptation falls short of our expectations. Just as the change from one medium to another brings about indisputable differences, so, too, does the change of the type of creator. We are no longer before the novelist's perspective, but before the filmmaker's, and "[t]his change in person brings about a change in sensibilities that completely transforms the work of art" (Barkataki 101). Thus, in *To Kill a Mockingbird* we must take into account Harper Lee and Robert Mulligan.[6]

[6] Robert Mulligan (1925—2008) was the director of "To Kill a Mockingbird" and Horton Foote (1916—2009) was responsable for its screenplay. I mention Mulligan as the creator of the film adaptation because, as Linda Hutcheon explains *in A Theory of Adaptation*, " … the director is

It would be much more useful if instead of viewing books and films on competitive terms, we started to see them as two separate, independent works of art belonging to different media and possessing different features on their own.[7] In the same way, we should stop taking for granted "that literature can subvert film, or film literature" (Sarris 14), for that is not a condition sine qua non within the phenomenon of adaptation.

Once the original text has undergone the process of adaptation, we no longer have a single text, but two. For the spectator who does not know or is not acquainted with the source text that would be no problem, but if the spectator is familiar with it, the adaptation, "is unavoidably a kind of intertextuality … It is an ongoing dialogical process, as Mikhail Bakhtin would have said, in which we compare the work we already know with the one we are experiencing" (Hutcheon 21).[8] In the case of cinematographic adaptations, "the viewer 'receives' the original literary text along with seeing the film, and specifically receives the former in its difference from or equivalence to the latter" (Rajewsky 53). The visual medium constituted by the film depends explicitly on the linguistic medium (the novel), so that, within the framework of intertextuality and, more specifically, intermediality and media transposition, "the 'original' text, film, etc., is the 'source' of the newly formed media product, whose formation is based on a media-specific and obligatory intermedial transformation process" (Rajewsky 51).

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ultimately held responsible for the overall vision and therefore for the adaptation *as adaptation*" (Hutcheon 85), even though it is actually "the director and the screenwriter [who] share the primary task of adaptation" (Hutcheon 85).

[7] Even though in the case of film adaptations the connection between the film and a previous work (a play, a novel…) is obvious, this does not mean that one has to be better than the other, or that the only possible approach is that of fidelity.

[8] It would be probably easier for the adapter to engage an audience with no prior contact with the adapted text, since they would be "more likely to greet a film version simply as a new film, not as an adaptation at all [and] the director … [would] have greater freedom—and control" (Hutcheon 121).

In the 1960s, Julia Kristeva defined ‘intertextuality’ as “the transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another” (qtd. in D'Angelo 33). Concerning film adaptations “in many cases what is recorded is a great work of art in its own right … ” (Khatchadourian 281), and so, “the film director must make the decision as to whether the adaptation—which should be a creative act in its own right—would result in a film that is comparable in aesthetic worth to the “original” (281).

An instance of intertextuality could be the juxtaposition of Lee’s novel (*To Kill a Mockingbird*) and Foote’s screenplay (“To Kill a Mockingbird”). They refer to the same story, but they are not the same, for they address Scout’s tale from different points of view. Although, in general, the dialogues are very similar in both texts,

> the star system of the Hollywood studio productions of the sixties changed the focus of the novel in crucial ways. In the screen version, … Atticus Finch (Gregory Peck), becomes the central character. The American white male, cast here in the heroic figure of a progressive liberal lawyer fighting for the civil rights of a black man falsely accused of raping a young white woman, dominates the action. This shifts our attention onto the campaigning for, and survival of, the rights and principles of racial justice which are denied to the accused African-American, Tom Robinson. (Nicholson 66)

Intertextuality appears as a more fruitful approach than that of fidelity. McFarlane claims that the pointless and obstinate insistence on fidelity

> tends to ignore the idea of adaptation as an example of convergence among the arts, perhaps a desirable—even inevitable—process in a rich culture; it fails to take into serious account what may be transferred from novel to film as distinct from what will require more complex processes of adaptation; and it marginalizes

> those production determinants which have nothing to do with the novel but may be powerfully influential upon the film. (McFarlane 10)

As a result of this continuous fixation with fidelity to the original, significant aspects of adaptations have been missed or have not received all the attention they deserve. Intertextuality, however, offers us a compelling alternative, so that just "as Christopher Orr remarks: 'Within this critical context [i.e. of intertextuality], the issue is not whether the adapted film is faithful to its source, but rather how the choice of a specific source and how the approach to that source serve the film's ideology'" (qtd. in McFarlane 10). However, ideology is not the only aspect that matters. It is also interesting to see how the elements that have been taken from the source text are then dealt with in the new text. For example, Tom Robinson's trial and Atticus' defence are more emphasised in the film than in the novel. As Shackelford claims:

> Unlike the book, the film is primarily centered on the rape trial and the racism of Maycomb which has made it possible—not surprising considering it was made during what was to become the turbulent period of the 1960s when racial issues were of interest to Hollywood and the country as a whole. (105)

Hence, the question is not whether the adaptation has been faithful to its source, but, rather, what variations have been necessarily made in relation to the story's transfer from one medium to another, and how have these changes influenced the resulting product.

In light of the foregoing, the contrast between "showing" and "telling" seems both opportune and relevant. Recalling what we have said about the novel being primarily linguistic and the film being primarily visual, "to tell a story, as in novels, … is to describe, explain, summarize, expand ... To show a story, as in movies, ballets, radio and

stage plays, musicals and operas, involves a direct aural and usually visual performance experienced in real time" (Hutcheon 13), so that "description, narration, and represented thoughts must be transcoded into speech, actions, sounds, and visual images … " (Hutcheon 40). This makes changes inevitable, since themes, characters, and plot must be somehow refocused within the new medium. Even though the novel provides a deeper insight into the story and its characters, "when aspects of mystery and of terror at the unknown form part of the narrative—the film often seems better able to convey a sense of threat, of suspense and of shadowy uncertainty" (Nicholson 71), since we can actually see the elements that compose the menacing atmosphere. Furthermore, sound and music also help to represent this mood of uneasiness. The fact that actions are shown and not just simply told or described, renders the story more objective, for we now see "everything the camera 'sees', not just what impressed itself on the hero-narrator's imaginative responsiveness" (McFarlane 16).

To recapitulate, the process of adaptation involves two essential steps: first, the literary work must be transformed into a screenplay and second, the screenplay must be transformed into film. Once the transfer from the linguistic to the visual medium has been fulfilled, the resulting product is often judged on the basis of a fidelity discourse that understands adaptation as a mere copy of the original. Many critics argue that this is not the most productive and reliable approach and propose intertextuality as a more fertile alternative. According to this other approach, the similarities and differences existing between the source and the adapted text do not imply that one is a copy and the other the original; on the contrary, both of them stand up as two autonomous works of art. Inevitably, "we retell—and show again and interact anew with—stories over and over …" (Hutcheon 177), and although it has been made clear that changes are, in any event, sure to happen, in the end "the true meaningful question is not whether the film maker

has respected his model, but whether he has respected his own vision" (Bluestone, "Word to Image" 176), for that is all that matters.

2. THE SOUTH: AN OVERVIEW FROM 1930S TO 1960S

Although the story of *To Kill a Mockingbird* takes place in the 1930s, Lee began the novel in the mid-1950s and it would not be published until 1960, just before the peak of the American civil rights movement. This chapter will explain the significant changes in American society during those three decades and study how these changes affected the novel and the film's reception by the general public.

In order to shed some light on this matter, I will pay attention to three defining aspects of the American society which play a crucial role both in the film and in the novel: race, class, and gender. This will allow me to explain, in the following chapter, how these three points intersect and have an effect on three of the main female characters of the novel: Scout, Calpurnia and Mayella. But for now, I will begin by briefly explaining the historical context of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

The 1930s, the decade in which Scout's story is set, are known as the years of the Great Depression. In the novel, Scout explains that "there were sit-down strikes in Birmingham; bread lines in the cities grew longer, people in the country grew poorer" (Lee 132). In October 1929, the stock market crashed, and this event was soon followed by the fall of the industrial production, giving rise to the worst unemployment America had ever witnessed. Scout, surprised by the fact that Walter Cunningham, one of Atticus' clients, did not pay him with money but with sacks of potatoes, turnips or any other type of vegetables he cultivated, asks her father:

> "Are we poor, Atticus?"
>
> Atticus nodded. "We are indeed."

> Jem's nose wrinkled. "Are we as poor as the Cunninghams?"
>
> "Not exactly. The Cunninghams are country folks, farmers, and the crash hit them hardest."
>
> Atticus said professional people were poor because the farmers were poor. As Maycomb County was farm country, nickels and dimes were hard to come by for doctors and dentists and lawyers …
>
> As the Cunninghams had no money to pay a lawyer, they simply paid us with what they had. (Lee 23)

By 1933, at least twenty-five percent of the work force was unemployed. Hunger, poverty and desperation fell upon millions of Americans as a result of this economic disaster. Many Americans were hardly able to support their families during the crisis. In the novel, Lee refers several times to the social and economic downturn which followed the stock market crash. In Chapter 1, for instance Scout tells us:

> A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County. But it was a time of vague optimism for some of the people: Maycomb County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself. (Lee 6)

The fictional town of Maycomb is part of the state of Alabama, whose economy was, at the time, mainly based on cotton. At the beginning of the novel, Scout informs us about her family traditions: "It was customary for the men in the family to remain on Simon's homestead, Finch's Landing, and make their living from cotton" (Lee 4). In 1920, cotton prices fell from about $0.42 to $0.13 a pound. In order to reverse this decline,

> [s]everal federal programs attempted to aid southern cotton farmers in the 1920s, but little was accomplished until Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt instituted his New Deal programs in response to the Great Depression. The president signed into law the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, … which paid cotton farmers to plow under one-third of their crops to reduce production and raise cotton prices. The act helped landowners but hurt many sharecroppers, who made up most of the farming population, because their labor was no longer needed. (Phillips and Roberts)

Added to the decline of the cotton economy, were the problems of racism and segregation, which were present in most states of the Deep South, supported by Jim Crow laws

RACISM

In words of J. William Harris, Race is "a matter of culture; it is part of a system of meanings" (Harris 389), but "[w]ith signs and symbols, groups of people divide themselves from "others" according to characteristics they conceive to be primordial and thus unchangeable" (Harris 389-390).

Racial prejudices and the belief that white people are inherently superior to blacks have permeated American society since the moment when twenty Africans were first brought to the British colony of Virginia against their will in 1619. These twenty captives were sold, becoming the first slaves to arrive in what would become the United States. This was just the beginning of the institution of slavery in America. Although

> forced labor was not uncommon … enslavement had not been based on race. The trans-Atlantic slave trade, which began as early as the 15th century, introduced a system of slavery that was commercialized, racialized and inherited. Enslaved

> people were seen not as people at all but as commodities to be bought, sold and exploited (Elliott and Hughes).

There was a "body of beliefs about the status and capabilities of Negroes" (Davis et al. 20) that Americans shared. Black people were thought to be uncivilised, ill-mannered, lazy, irresponsible, liar, sexually promiscuous, excessively passionate, immoral, potential robbers, and emotionally unstable individuals prone to violence and capable of killing in a fit of rage; all this withouth any hint of guilt or remorse. Like a child dependent of his parents, the Negro depended upon the whites' protection. This body of beliefs constituted the ideological system used to justify white supremacy and the inequality of social relationships within American society (Davis et al. 20). To the whites, "the subordination of the Negro … is based upon immutable factors, inevitable and everlasting. To them, the Negro is a lower form of organism, biologically more primitive, mentally inferior, and emotionally undeveloped. He is insensitive to pain, incapable of learning, and animal-like in his behavior" (Davis et al. 15-16). With these racist ideas in mind, let us read Scout's observation in the novel after learning that Tom Robinson had been shot to death when the guards caught him trying to escape from prison:

> To Maycomb, Tom's death was Typical. Typical of a nigger to cut and run. Typical of a nigger's mentality to have no plan, no thought for the future, just run blind first chance he saw. Funny thing, Atticus Finch might've got him off scot free, but wait—? Hell no. You know how they are. Easy come, easy go. Just shows you, that Robinson boy was legally married, they say he kept himself clean, went to church and all that, but when it comes down to the line the veneer's mighty thin. Nigger always comes out in 'em. (Lee 275)

Initially, Tom was regarded by Maycomb's people as a decent man. However, after his death, they suddenly changed their minds and seemed to agree that, no matter

how hard one tries, it is impossible to fight one's nature. Deep inside, Tom Robinson was no different than the rest of Negroes. After all, that was what he was: a Negro.

After the abolition of slavery in 1865, after the end of Civil War (1861–1865), most Southern states, determined to deny black people their new freedom, adopted during the Reconstruction era (1865–1877) a set of laws known as "Black Codes" which regulated the rights and privileges of freedmen and ensured that African Americans were treated as inferiors and relegated to a secondary, subordinate position in society. The violence and terrorism that swept over the South in the 1860s and 1870s attested an evident lack of protection for this specific population group. Officially, the Constitution (and the Fourteenth Amendment adopted in 1868) guaranteed equality, but the reality of white supremacy in the southern states denied them their rights. At the end of Reconstruction in 1877, Jim Crow laws strengthened the system of discrimination and racial segregation in the American South; this situation lasted until the 1950s, with the beginning of the civil rights movement. In 1963, Martin Luther King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech before a crowd of 250.000 people who were attending the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. At the Lincoln Memorial, King expressed his desire for equal civil rights for African Americans and urged American citizens to have faith and to be open to change:

> I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream …
>
> I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal".[9]

[9] These are the words that mark the beginning of the Declaration of Independence of 1776: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by

> I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.
>
> I have a dream today …
>
> When we let freedom ring … from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children … will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!". (King, "I Have a Dream")

One year later, in 1964, under the direction of President Lyndon Johnson, the government passed the Civil Rights Act, which ended segregation in public places and prohibited employment discrimination on the basis of race, sex, colour, religion or national origin. The Voting Rights Act, signed into law in 1965, enabled African Americans the right to vote on equal terms with the rest of the population.

In the time the novel is set, however, segregation was still a reality and "racial division between the dominant whites and subordinate African Americans determined almost every aspect of society" (Fuller 606). After the American Civil War (1861–65), an event which is referred to several times in the novel, African Americans and the slaves who had been emancipated were granted citizenship and equal civil and legal rights by means of the the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and, later, the Fourteenth Amendment, adopted in 1868.[10] Most Southern states, reacted against the law and created their own black codes

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their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" ("Text of the Declaration of Independence"). As Elliott and Hughes claim, "So begins … the document that eventually led to the creation of the United States. But the words point to the paradox the nation was built on: Even as the colonists fought for freedom from the British, they maintained slavery and avoided the issue in the Constitution".

[10] In the novel, Bob Ewell, Mayella's father, could be related to Robert E. Lee (1807—1870), "a Confederate general who led the South's attempt at secession during the Civil War. He challenged Union forces during the war's bloodiest battles … before surrendering to Union General Ulysses S. Grant in 1865 at Appomattox Court House in Virginia, marking the end of the devastating conflict that nearly split the United States" ("Robert E. Lee."). In Chapter 23, we

as proof of their disagreement with the content of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. During the Jim Crow era, "segregation forbade African Americans from drinking from the same water fountains, eating at the same restaurants or attending the same schools as white Americans … " (Shah and Adolphe). The division between black and white people is also prominent in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. When it was decided that Arthur Radley (also known as "Boo"), a white young man, had to be imprisoned, we are told that "[t]he sheriff hadn't the heart to put him in jail alongside Negroes, so Boo was locked in the courthouse basement" (Lee 12). Division between whites and blacks in public places can be seen also in Chapter 16, when people are sitting outside the courthouse waiting for Tom Robinson's trial to begin; whites on one side, blacks on the other:

> The courthouse square was covered with picnic parties sitting on newspapers, washing down biscuit and syrup with warm milk from fruit jars. Some people were gnawing on cold chicken and cold fried pork chops. The more affluent chased their food with drugstore Coca-Cola … In a far corner of the square, the Negroes sat quietly in the sun, dining on sardines, crackers, and the more vivid flavors of Nehi Cola … " (Lee 182)

A third illustration of racial segregation in the novel is the fact that there are two separate churches, and Lula, a black woman, makes it clear to Calpurnia: "You ain't got no business bringin' white chillun here—they got their church, we got our'n. It is our church, ain't it, Miss Cal?' (Lee 136)

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are told that "Mr. Ewell was a veteran of an obscure war" (Lee 248) and when he is called to testify during Tom Robinson's trial, we learn that his name is "… Robert E. Lee Ewell!" (Lee 193). The connection between the two is evident.

In relation with racism and racial segregation, another issue emerges: the resemblance of the Deep South with Nazi Germany. As Grill and Jenkins remark,

> There were many similarities between pre-1938 Nazi discriminatory racial laws and their counterparts in the South. The Nuremberg Laws, which prohibited sexual relations between Jews and Aryans, were similar to southern laws that banned racial intermarriage . In both societies a minority was disenfranchised and dominated by a "master race". (692)

The American South, however, rejected and denied any similarity with Nazi Germany, expressing their disconformity with it. It was not the first time that the South criticised an European society. In fact, "the employment of children in British factories in the early nineteenth century outraged southern slaveowners just as German anti-Semitism disgusted most southern spokesmen during the 1930s. The South's moral double standard was certainly not unique, either in the nineteenth or in the twentieth century" (Grill and Jenkins 692). Southern whites condemned Nazi racism and their system of Aryan supremacy, while at the same time they did mostly the same with black people, "defending white supremacy and segregation in the south" (Grill and Jenkins 688).

Just like Southern white Americans who expressed their aversion to the way in which Jews were treated in Nazi Germany, black people "understood and shared the American concern about … [the Jews], but many of them also resented the mass meetings and rallies held across the nation in support of the Jewish cause while the deplorable conditions of black Americans … were neglected" (Grill and Jenkins 691). This matter is also tackled in the novel (Chapter 26) when Scout is at school and the teacher is telling her students that, unlike Germany, America is a democracy:

> “That’s the difference between America and Germany. We are a democracy and Germany is a dictatorship … ” she said. “Over here we don’t believe in persecuting anybody. Persecution comes from people who are prejudiced … ” …
>
> An inquiring soul in the middle of the room said, “Why don’t they like the Jews, you reckon, Miss Gates?”
>
> “I don’t know, Henry. They contribute to every society they live in, and most of all, they are a deeply religious people. Hitler’s trying to do away with religion, so maybe he doesn’t like them for that reason.”
>
> Cecil spoke up. “Well I don’t know for certain,” he said, “they’re supposed to change money or somethin’, but that ain’t no cause to persecute ’em. They’re white, ain’t they?” (Lee 281)

Like most Americans in the 1930s, Scout agrees that persecuting Jews is wrong. She knows her teacher is right about what she says, but she also realises that Miss Gates is being hypocritical:

> “Miss Gates is a nice lady, ain’t she?”
>
> “Why sure,” said Jem …
>
> “She hates Hitler a lot …”
>
> “What’s wrong with that?”
>
> “Well, she went on today about how bad it was him treatin’ the Jews like that. Jem, it’s not right to persecute anybody, is it? I mean have mean thoughts about anybody, even, is it?”
>
> “Gracious no, Scout. What’s eatin’ you?”

> "Well, coming out of the courthouse that night Miss Gates was … talking with Miss Stephanie Crawford. I heard her say it's time somebody taught 'em a lesson, they were gettin' way above themselves, an' the next thing they think they can do is marry us. Jem, how can you hate Hitler so bad an' then turn around and be ugly about folks right at home—" (Lee 282-283)

SOCIAL DIVISION. CASTE AND CLASS

The South of the 1930s was governed by a caste system that "control[led] and define[d] the relations between the two color groups and [was] the principal factor in the interactions between any Negro and any white" (Davis et al. 57). Whites were automatically ranked higher than blacks, and social mobility was not possible between the two groups. In accordance with the alleged inherent inferiority and impurity of this group, blacks were not allowed to marry white people, a prohibition "reinforced by the absolute taboo on sexual relations between black men and white women" (Fuller 608) and the belief that all black men were potential rapists who would doubtlessly defile the purity of the innocent white woman.

After the abolition of slavery and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, the concepts of "etiquette" and "deference," "the respectful yielding exhibited by the Negroes in their contacts with whites" (Davis et al. 22) became crucial, for it was the only possible way of marking racial boundaries and signalling that black and white people were socially distinct; the formers being subordinate to the latters (Davis et al. 22).[11]

[11] In "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor", Erving Goffman defines 'etiquette' as the "code which governs ceremonial rules and ceremonial expressions" and that comprises the "conventionalized means of communication by which the individual expresses his character or conveys his appreciation of the other participants" (476-477).

Determined actions such as addressing whites by titles (Sir, Mr., Mrs., Boss…) and blacks only by their names or through patronising terms like "boy," are just some samples of the codes of behaviour typical of the 1930s. A black man had to remove his hat every time he met or spoke to a white. Conversely, "[a] white man … would never remove his hat because of the presence of a black person" (Harris 391). In Chapter 12, Jem and Scout go with Calpurnia to her church and when they arrive, black people around react immediately: "When they saw Jem and me with Calpurnia, the men stepped back and took off their hats; the women crossed their arms at their waists, weekday gestures of respectful attention. They parted and made a small pathway to the church door for us. (Lee 135). This deferential behavior extended also to blacks' speech. They had to be very careful what they said and how they said it. In the event that they dared to contradict a white man, insinuate or even accuse him of lying, whites would not hesitate to put them in their place (Davis et al. 23). Hence, fear of reprisals may explain why Tom corrects himself when Mr. Gilmer, the solicitor, asks him the following questions during the trial:

> "She says she asked you to bust up a chiffarobe, is that right?"
>
> "No suh, it ain't."
>
> "Then you say she's lying, boy?"
>
> Atticus was on his feet, but Tom Robinson didn't need him. "I don't say she's lyin', Mr. Gilmer, I say she's mistaken in her mind." (Lee 224)

Tom does not openly say that Mayella is lying in order not to contradict her words, but he knows the truth, and the truth is that she has made up the whole story to blame him for something he has not done.

In order to live, blacks necessarily had to abide by social constructs. Otherwise, they would be at risk of being deemed a threat to public order and accused of rebelling

against the social system and racial hierarchy that the whites had imposed on them. In that case, they would be exposed to several kinds of brutal punishments, among which were included hanging and mob lynchings, for as J. William Harris claims, "Etiquette maintained boundaries; when crossed, violence restored them" (393).

Regarding the racial code and the constrictions of etiquette, it should be noted that these not only affected African Americans, but also whites. In words of Davis et al., "[a] white … must not apply to … [blacks] any of the symbols of equality commonly used between whites; and if he disobeys these rules of conduct, he encounters the disapproval of the white world. If he persits in flaunting custom, he may even become an outcaste" (24). Atticus, by going against the codes of deferential behaviour, is also going against his own people, so it was not surprising that he ended up arounsing apprehension among his white neigbours, as in the case of Mrs. Dubose, who, at one point in the novel, shouts at the children: "Your father's no better than the niggers and trash he works for!" (Lee 117)

We have seen that, within the caste system, social mobility between the two colour groups is not possible, but if we leave the caste organisation aside for a moment and focus on class instead, we will realise that "there are, in the very nature of the class organization, mechanisms established by which people move up and down the vertical extensions of the society" (Warner 234).

Together with caste, class division was the other prevalent system for social classification. According to Davis, there exist three main social classes: 1) upper, 2) middle, and 3) lower. Each of these larger groups can be divided into two subclasses: 1) upper-upper class and lower-upper class; 2) upper-middle class and lower-middle class; 3) upper-lower class and lower-lower class (Davis et al. 63). In Chapter 23, Jem explains to Scout how class division worked in Maycomb:

> "There's four kinds of folks in the world. There's the ordinary kind like us and the neighbors, there's the kind like the Cunninghams out in the woods, the kind like the Ewells down at the dump, and the Negroes."
>
> " … The thing about it is, our kind of folks don't like the Cunninghams, the Cunninghams don't like the Ewells, and the Ewells hate and despise the colored folks." (Lee 258)

If we applied Jem's idea of Maycomb's society to the previous classification, the resulting social hierarchy would be the following: in the upper-class group we would find the Finches and Maycomb's professional men, including Heck Tate and Judge Taylor; next, in the middle-class group we would have "the numerous faceless and often nameless individuals who flesh out Miss Lee's story" (Erisman 26), such as Mr. Underwood, the owner of *The Maycomb Tribune*; and finally, in the lower-class group we would have the Cunninghams, poor but honourable, honest men. The Ewells and the blacks are left out of this classification because Maycomb's population did not consider them part of society. The Ewells, called "white trash," were the dregs of the town and the blacks were blacks, so nothing could be done in that regard. As Fred Erisman points out, even though the Ewells were "more slovenly than the supposedly slovenliest of the blacks, [they] still possess[ed] the redeeming grace of a white skin" (26-27).

All members of every social class are aware of the fact that there are people socially superior and inferior to them. However, "[a]lthough an individual recognizes most clearly the existence of groups immediately above and below his own, he is usually not aware of the social distance actually maintained between his own and these adjacent groups" (Davis et al. 71). Moreover, it often happens that "individuals visualize class groups above them less clearly than those below them … " (Davis et al. 72). Thereby,

members of the middle class, especially those belonging to the upper-middle class, resent the upper class, considering they should be part of that group, too.

Honouring her social status, Aunt Alexandra shows concern about "moral respectability, keeping up appearances, community participation, and suchlike values …" (Fuller 609). As descendant of the "old aristocracy" and member of the upper class, Atticus' class-conscious sister values the past and is preoccupied with aspects such as heredity and lineage. In Chapter 13, Scout, who does not seem to share Alexandra's excitement about class and social status, expresses her skepticism in relation to her aunt's ideals:

> "I never understood her preoccupation with heredity. Somewhere, I had received the impression that Fine Folks were people who did the best they could with the sense they had, but Aunt Alexandra was of the opinion … that the longer a family had been squatting on one patch of land the finer it was" (Lee 147).

She wants Jem and Scout to be aware of their position in society and their family legacy. That is why, in the same chapter, Atticus approaches the children and admits:

> "Your aunt has asked me to try and impress upon you and Jean Louise that you are not from run-of-the-mill people, that you are the product of several generations' gentle breeding … She asked me to tell you you must try to behave like the little lady and gentleman that you are. She wants to talk to you about the family and what it's meant to Maycomb County … so you'll have some idea of who you are, so you might be moved to behave accordingly." (Lee 151)

Undeniably, the Finches were known and respected by everybody in Maycomb. However, Aunt Alexandra's idea of their social position did not correspond with reality, for it was mainly based on a past that had been left behind long ago. When Jem tells Scout

that Atticus had said that Aunt Alexandra's obsession with lineage was due to the fact that background was all their family had, Scout responds: "'Well Jem, I don't know—Atticus told me one time that most of this Old Family stuff's foolishness because everybody's family's just as old as everybody else's. I said did that include the colored folks and Englishmen and he said yes.'" (Lee 258) Throughout the story, Aunt Alexandra obstinately insists on speaking and behaving as an upper class lady, proud of her social position as member of the old aristocracy; thus failing to realise that her idea of power and authority bound to lineage had already ceased to make sense within the context of the postbellum South, especially in the aftermath of the Great Depression of the 1930s.

As to why people belong to one or another class, there seems to be little agreement between the reasons given by members of the different classes. Upper-class people hold that the main reason lies in time and lineage membership. Middle-class individuals agree with the upper-class members that time is a key aspect, but they consider wealth as well. Lastly, lower-class people see the class system exclusively in terms of wealth (Davis et al. 72).

We have seen that, in the 1930s, the Southern society was organised simultaneously on the basis of a caste and class system where the privileged white group was always superior. Whenever the two systems of social organisation came into play, caste and racial distinctions were always prioritised over the system of class division. Therefore, even in the case of a black man born into the upper class and superior in class to middle and lower-class whites, he would still be inferior in caste and he would be continually reminded of that by both the upper and the lower-class whites. Moreover, if he insisted on pointing to his upper-class condition, "the supraordinate white class would maintain the solidarity of the white group by repudiating any claims by any Negro of superiority to the lower-class whites. This would be true even though the admission might

be made privately that the Negro was superior to certain of the lower-class whites" (Warner 236). This is what we see in the novel with the Ewells and the Negroes. Some black men may be superior in class to the poor and mannerless white trash embodied by Bob Ewell and his family, but with regard to the caste system, they will be considered inferior without exception. They are black, and in the racist rural community of Maycomb, that is a decisive detail, for it entails that the Negroes, no matter how good they are, will be automatically relegated to the lowest position in the social hierarchy.

White supremacy is also present in all social institutions, including family, church, school, judicial bodies, police and politics; all arranged so as to "fit the dominant-caste social situation" (Davis et al. 13). The Negro is always in inferior conditions in every aspect of society and public life. For instance, with regard to justice,

> The political and court procedures … demonstrate that, although the formal statements of the law books, on the whole, show no discrimination between the two castes, the actual practices, while taking into account the moral code expressed in the law books, usually reverse the democratic code of the law when dealing with whites and Negroes. (Davis et al. 13)

Consequently, it was to be expected that Atticus and Tom Robinson would lose the case. It was a white woman's word against a black man's word, and the balance was clearly in favour of the first. So, after the jury's sentence, Atticus explains to Jem: "'There's something in our world that makes men lose their heads—they couldn't be fair if they tried. In our courts, when it's a white man's word against a black man's, the white man always wins. They're ugly, but those are the facts of life.'" (Lee 251-252). Likewise, as she reads Mr. Underwood's editorial later in the story, Scout realises that Atticus had been fighting a losing battle since the very beginning: " … Atticus had used every tool available to free men to save Tom Robinson, but in the secret courts of men's hearts

Atticus had no case. Tom was a dead man the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed" (Lee 276).

PATRIARCHY. GENDER

In her work *Theorizing patriarchy*, Sylvia Walby defines patriarchy as a "system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women" (214). The relationships between men and women are hierarchical and unequal. It has been instilled into women that they are inferior to men. Weaker, less intelligent, excessively emotional… they must settle for a supporting role and be the love interest of the male protagonist: "Women [exist] for men, not for themselves" (Warren 21). Their existence has always been bound to men, always in the latters' shadow. In words of Warren, "The biblical creation story of woman taken from man, woman as helpmeet, as cause for the downfall of man-as temptress, seducer, whore-laid the foundation for misogynistic treatment of and efforts by men to control women ... " (21). Apart from religion, arts such as painting, literature or cinema, contribute also to the spread of those foresaid sexist ideas and are part of a predominantly male chauvinist cultural tradition which has persisted until today.

In the 1930s, the preservation of white patriarchy was one of the major concerns of the southern states of the United States of America. White men were seen both as the defenders of the race and the protectors of women. As symbols of purity and whiteness, "white women had to be protected from defilement through contact, however slight and indirect … with "unclean" black men and women" (Harris 392). Sexual relationships between black men and white women were seen as damaging for the white race as a whole. The idea of white women seen as innocent and vulnerable against the black savages who attempted to rape them was nothing new: it had become a sort of myth which

was always presented in the same way: a black man being the one assaulting the white woman. According to Patton and Snyder-Yuly "[t]his racist myth has its roots in slavery and emancipation. Since slavery, Black sexuality has been stereotyped as wild, uncontrollable, bestial, and even criminal" (862), reinforcing the belief that white women had to be guarded zealously against black men. Together with murder, rape of white women was one of the worst and most terrible violations of purity and hierarchy (Harris 394). In crimes of the kind, the white woman's word was not disputed. If a white woman claimed that a Negro had raped her, she would not be doubted, for "[i]n a predominantly White community, the stereotypes of African Americans [went] unchallenged … " (Patton and Snyder-Yuly 872) and "[t]o challenge the allegations against the Black men in this case was to challenge the national narrative surrounding Black men" (Patton and Snyder-Yuly 873).

Any kind of sexual relationship between black men and white women was a threat, and punishment was the way to take care of it. The most common methods of punishment included hanging and lynching. Such level of brutality meant that the Negro "live[d] under the shadow of an ever present threat. He is a Negro, and woe unto him if he forgets; if necessary, the whites can and will enforce their authority with punishment and death" (Davis et al. 49). Near the end of Chapter 15, there is a scene where we can see a lynch mob facing Atticus, ready to end Tom's life. Scout, who had followed her father with Jem and Dill, describes the incident as follows:

> We were taking a short cut across the square when four dusty cars came in from the Meridian highway, moving slowly in a line. They went around the square, passed the bank building, and stopped in front of the jail …

> In ones and twos, men got out of the cars. Shadows became substance as light revealed solid shapes moving toward the jail door. Atticus remained where he was. The men hid him from view.
>
> 'He in there, Mr. Finch?' a man said. (Lee 171)

If sexual relations between black men and white women were consensual, and someone found out about it, both the white woman and the Negro would be punished, and she could even be expelled from her own community (Davis et al. 31). Inversely, if sexual relations were between white men and black women, there would be no such problem. Although in the 1930s interracial relationships were frowned upon, if it was the white man the one who transgressed the caste rules, and therefore, the racial code, that was a whole different story, proving, once again, that America is, essentially, a patriarchal society.

In the case of white men and black women with children, their mixed-raced offspring belonged to the black group. Although their light-coloured skin could have been perceived as a sign of superiority, "whites are also antagonistic to light-skinned blacks, not least because they are living evidence that the racial schism is being undermined" (Fuller 608). In this sense, the lawbreaker in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is Dolphus Raymond, who is apparently in love with a black woman. In Chapter 16, Scout, curious about why he is with the blacks instead of being with the whites, asks Jem:

> "Why's he sittin' with the colored folks?"
>
> "Always does. He likes 'em better'n he likes us, I reckon … He's got a colored woman and all sorts of mixed chillun … "
>
> "…He was supposed to marry one of the—the Spender ladies … but they didn't—after the rehearsal the bride went upstairs and blew her head off … "

"Did they ever know why?"

"No," said Jem, " ... They said it was because she found out about his colored woman … He's been sorta drunk ever since. You know, though, he's real good to those chillun—"

"Jem," I asked, "what's a mixed child?"

"Half white, half colored. You've seen 'em, Scout ... They're real sad."

"Sad, how come?"

"They don't belong anywhere. Colored folks won't have 'em because they're half white; white folks won't have 'em 'cause they're colored, so they're just in-betweens, don't belong anywhere" (Lee 183).

As a hierarchical system under which blacks and mixed-raced people were dominated by white men, "race in the South functioned much like class, so much so that, in some forms of analysis, race [was] class, operating under another name" (Harris 389). In the early twentieth century, the American society was configured unevenly, operating under a system of privileges that favoured the white man over the Negro, and over both white and black women simultaneously. Despite the fact that Atticus had provided the jury with convincing evidence of Tom's innocence, thus discarding the possibility that he could have raped Mayella, Tom is nonetheless condemned, so now, Atticus' famous speech in defence of Tom Robinson makes even more sense:

" … The witnesses for the state … have presented themselves to you gentlemen, to this court, in the cynical confidence that their testimony would not be doubted, confident that you gentlemen would go along with them on the assumption … that

> all Negroes lie, that all Negroes are basically immoral beings, that all Negro men are not to be trusted around our women …
>
> "Which, gentlemen, we know is in itself a lie as black as Tom Robinson's skin, a lie I do not have to point out to you. You know the truth, and the truth is this: some Negroes lie, some Negroes are immoral, some Negro men are not to be trusted around women—black or white. But this is a truth that applies to the human race and to no particular race of men ... " (Lee 232)

A RAY OF SUNSHINE IN THE DARK. OPTIMISM FOR THE FUTURE

Going back to the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter (What significant changes have taken place in American society from the 1930s to the 1960s? How have these changes affected the novel and the film's reception by the general public?), after WWII and the beginning of the American civil rights movement by the mid-1950s, day-to-day black resistance and African Americans' peaceful protests against white supremacy and racial oppression prompted the creation of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, which brought segregation to an end. Mass protests in the Southern cities, culminating in 1963 in the March on Washington, made white Americans more aware of the injustices that black people had suffered, and some of them joined the African Americans' cause in an act of solidarity.

Published in the early 1960s, *To Kill a Mockingbird* was perhaps too daring and shocking for its audience at the time. American civil right's movement had just begun and racism was still very entrenched in American society, so the fact that a white man like Atticus was willing to risk his and his children's lives in order to save a Negro was quite astonishing. In the last chapter of the book, Scout recalls Atticus' teaching on the value of empathy: "One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his

shoes and walk around in them" (Lee 321). That is exactly what Atticus had done by defending Tom Robinson. He had put in his shoes and had better grasped the adverisities of a black man's life, teaching Jem and Scout a fundamental lesson on racial empathy.

In this context, *To Kill a Mockingbird* emerges as an optimistic work which shows us that, in the end, good always triumphs over evil. Through the characters of Jem, Dill, and Scout, and the innocence that characterises childhood, it is suggested that learning from past sins and changing for the better is possible, that progress and social change are possible. With its heartwarming and optimistic tone, *To Kill a Mockingbird* reminds us that human goodness is part of each and every one of us and encourages us to have faith in a better, less prejudiced future.

3. BEING A WOMAN IN A MAN'S WORLD

In the southern culture of the 1930s, the ideal of femininity consisted of "four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" (Collins 72). Women were encouraged to aspire to these qualities that represented the archetypal, traditional idea of womanhood still prevalent in the postbellum American society. Women tried to meet everyone's expectations by struggling to appear as the historical social construct of the "southern lady", although the truth was that "[f]ew southern women actually lived the life of the lady or fully embodied her essential qualities: innocence, modesty, morality, piousness, delicacy, self-sacrificial devotion to family, and… whiteness" (Evans 150).

Some women were clumsy and rude rather than delicate and well-mannered as it was expected from them, but they had to make an effort to hide their flaws and fit into the traditional notion of womanhood which permeated the male-dominated society in which they lived. Commonly viewed as frail, vulnerable creatures depending on males'

protection, women were removed from the outside world to preserve their purity, relegated to the private, domestic sphere in charge of the household.

These ideas were deeply rooted in the American population of the thirties, and supported and spread by most social institutions, such as the Church and the legal system. Regarding the first, in Chapter 12 Scout notices Reverend Sykes' misogynistic sermon and complains: "Again, as I had often met it in my own church, I was confronted with the Impurity of Women doctrine that seemed to preoccupy all clergymen" (Lee 138). As regards justice, in Chapter 23, Scout suggests that Miss Maudie would be fairer than the men serving on the jury, but Atticus hurries to remind her that

> " … Miss Maudie can't serve on a jury because she's a woman—"
>
> "You mean women in Alabama can't—?" I was indignant.
>
> "I do. I guess it's to protect our frail ladies from sordid cases like Tom's … " (Lee 252)

As Atticus' words evidence, women played little or no part in the public sphere. Until the 1930s, only men worked outside the home to support their families while women took care of the children and kept themselves busy with the domestic chores. However, with the financial crisis that followed the stock market crash of 1929, many Americans lost their jobs and the situation was entirely reversed: unemployed men stayed at home and women took over the professional position from which they had long been excluded by joining the workforce. As Rotondi explains,

> From 1930 to 1940, the number of employed women in the United States rose 24 percent from 10.5 million to 13 million. The main reason for women's higher employment rates was the fact that the jobs available to women—so called "women's work"— were in industries that were less impacted by the stock market.

Thus, white women worked mainly as teachers and nurses, and black women continued to be restricted to domestic work. This situation triggered a domino effect, for as Margaret McFadden explains, "[m]en's sense of identity and their confidence in their roles as heads of households were based on their economic power, and when they lost that power, they feared they would no longer be in charge of the family" (11). In such a scenario, women had to adapt themselves to an unfamiliar male world where they had to work twice as much as men in order to prove that they were fit for their jobs, and all this without neglecting their role as wives, mothers and housekeepers.

In this context of gender inequality, Calpurnia, Mayella, and Scout strive to stay afloat in the male-dominated microcosm of Maycomb's rural town. With all the odds against her (she is poor, black, and a woman), Calpurnia devotes all her time to the Finch family, raising Jem and Scout as if they were her own children, even though she has children of her own. Mayella, for her part, assumes the role of her mother and takes care of her younger brothers and sisters while enduring her father's abuse. Lastly, Scout expresses her disgust at the adult world (especially at the women's world), and refuses to grow up, aware of all that comes with this.

SCOUT'S REJECTION OF FEMININITY

As a faithful representation of the classic tomboy, Scout rejects and avoids anything "feminine" as much as possible, preferring overalls and pants over dresses, and going on adventures with Jem and Dill raher than staying at home sewing or doing whatever activity girls were supposed to do.[12]

[12] The OED defines "tomboy" as "[a] girl or young woman who acts or dresses in what is considered to be a boyish way, *esp.* one who likes rough or energetic activities conventionally more associated with boys" ("tomboy, n. and adj.").

Scout's tomboyish attitude is twofold, since it could be "associated with both the subversion of gender roles and the perpetuation of an oppressive, dichotomous gender system" (Carr 531). On the one hand, by refusing to behave as most girls of her class and age do, she is, at the same time, defying the fixed set of rules that regulate Maycomb's society and rebelling against gender roles. On the other hand, however, Scout's refusal to conform to traditional gender expectations may be seen as resulting from the acknowledgement of women's alleged inferiority and the consequent tacit acceptance of men's superiority. In this sense, rejecting femininity in favour of a more powerful manly attitude would seem fairly reasonable, although this would somehow foster male supremacy, doing women no favour.

In the case of Scout, who is a child and has not probably considered any of these possibilities, she does not want to be compared to a girl because she dislikes the prejudiced, stereotypical idea of womanhood that she has been instilled. In the fourth chapter, Scout says: " … Jem told me I was being a girl, that girls always imagined things, that's why other people hated them so, and if I started behaving like one I could just go off and find some to play with" (Lee 45). Assuming that being a girl is an undesirable thing, Scout tries her best to hide and repress even the slightest hint of femininity so as to please (or so she thinks she is doing) her male playmates. In Chapter 6, Scout attempts to talk Dill and her brother out of their nighttime adventure, but Jem yells at her: "'Scout, I'm tellin' you for the last time, shut your trap or go home—I declare to the Lord you're gettin' more like a girl every day!'" (Lee 58). Faced with such an unpleasant situation, and feeling insulted, Scout stops insisting. She narrates: "With that, I had no option but to join them" (Lee 58). Fearing that Jem and Dill would exclude her from their plans, she comes to the conclusion that the best she can do is give up and follow them.

Like most tomboys, Scout enjoys many of the activities commonly considered as typical of boys, even when this involved the disapproval of some of the women of her community. Certain female characters are constantly reprimanding Scout, reminding her that her behaviour and her attire are not appropriate for a girl. This is the case of Aunt Alexandra, and Mrs. Dubose, who, in Chapter 11 while Jem and Scout are passing by her house, asks her: "'And you—' … —'what are you doing in those overalls? You should be in a dress and camisole, young lady! You'll grow up waiting on tables if somebody doesn't change your ways—a Finch waiting on tables at the O.K. Café—hah!'" (Lee 116-117). Lady is the keyword. This is exactly what Mrs. Dubose and her society, in general, expect her to become when she grows up. As an upper-class girl, Scout should dress and behave as a lady. The problem is that she does not intend to assume the role of the southern belle, because she does not like most of the women she knows. Scout has the impression that Southern women are "gossips, provincials, weaklings, extremists, even racists" (Shackelford 111), and she does not want to be like them.

A motherless child, Scout turns to Calpurnia, Miss Maudie, and Aunt Alexandra for guidance. These maternal figures act as Scout's female role models. However, Atticus, "playing the role of mother and father to her and demonstrating stereotypically feminine traits [being conciliatory, passive, tolerant, and partially rejecting the traditional masculine admiration for violence, guns, and honor]" (Shackelford 110) is the one who influences Scout the most, and the one with whom she identifies. Just like Scout, Atticus is not the typical Southern man. Rather than conforming to masculine stereotypes, he disregards society's expectations and lives the way he wants. Scout is fully aware that he is not like her peers' fathers, and although at first she resents him for being different, she

eventually realises that it is precisely his unconventional behaviour that makes him the best possible role model for her and her gender-bending tendencies.[13]

Unlike Aunt Alexandra, Atticus does not intend to teach his daughter how to dress and behave, to turn her into a lady. He loves Scout and accepts her the way she is. He does not try to change her. On the contrary, he supports her in her choice of refusing to bend to conventional femininity and even encourages her to subvert societal expectations.

As she grows up, Scout feels more and more the pressure of social conventions, but she remains resolute in her decision not to become a "southern belle." In Chapter 9, Uncle Jack hears Scout speaking swear words and tells her to watch her mouth, for that is not appropriate for a girl and when he asks her "'You want to grow up to be a lady, don't you?'", she does not hesitate to reply that "not particularly" (Lee 90).

Nearly everyone in Maycomb took for granted that Scout would eventually become a lady. How could it be otherwise? Why would she go against conventions? It was hard enough to move into the unknown adult world without the added worry of being continually lectured on her behaviour, but people like Aunt Alexandra did not seem to understand it. She was so committed in her determination to mould Scout into a lady that even Atticus felt sometimes exasperated by his sister's insistence on changing his daughter. After an argument between her father and her aunt, Scout explains:

> "It had something to do with my going around in overalls. Aunt Alexandra was fanatical on the subject of my attire. I could not possibly hope to be a lady if I

[13] In the first part of the book, Scout complains about her father's apparent lack of manliness: "He did not do the things our schoolmates' fathers did: he never went hunting, he did not play poker or fish or drink or smoke. He sat in the livingroom and read" (Lee 102-103). According to Scout, there was nothing extraordinary about Atticus: "Our father didn't do anything … Atticus did not drive a dump-truck for the county, he was not the sheriff, he did not farm, work in a garage, or do anything that could possibly arouse the admiration of anyone" (Lee 102).

> wore breeches; when I said I could do nothing in a dress, she said I wasn't supposed to be doing things that required pants. Aunt Alexandra's vision of my deportment involved playing with small stoves, tea sets, and wearing the Add-A-Pearl necklace she gave me when I was born; furthermore, I should be a ray of sunshine in my father's lonely life. I suggested that one could be a ray of sunshine in pants just as well, but Aunty said that one had to behave like a sunbeam, that I was born good but had grown progressively worse every year" (Lee 92-93).

Much to Aunt Alexandra's dismay, Scout is not interested in playing house or any other game for girls. She enjoys playing outdoors with the boys, and she definitely hates wearing dresses. In Chapter 14 she compares the sensation of wearing this garment with being imprisoned: "I felt the starched walls of a pink cotton penitentiary closing in on me, and for the second time in my life I thought of running away" (Lee 155). Clearly, Scout does not belong to the alien world of women; she does not fit in there. In Chapter 23, she reveals that "[l]adies in bunches always filled [her] with vague apprehension and a firm desire to be elsewhere" (Lee 262).

In spite of their efforts, Aunt Alexandra, Mrs. Dubose and all the neighbours who tell Scout how to behave, are unable to feminise her. In fact, with their constant reprimands they achieve the opposite effect, making Scout reaffirm her decision to resist gender conventions. After joining one of the reunions of Aunt Alexandra's missionary circle, Scout makes the following observation:

> " … I wondered at the world of women … I must soon enter this world, where on its surface fragrant ladies rocked slowly, fanned gently, and drank cool water. But I was more at home in my father's world. People like Mr. Heck Tate did not trap you with innocent questions to make fun of you; even Jem was not highly critical unless you said something stupid. Ladies seemed to live in faint horror of men …

> But I liked them. There was something about them … that I instinctively liked … they weren't— "Hypocrites … " (Lee 266-267).

As Shackelford puts it, "In a world in which men seem to have the advantages and seem to be more fair-minded and less intolerant than women with their petty concerns and superficial dress codes, why should she conform to the notion of Southern ladyhood?" (113). Scout does not want to be part of such a shallow world where manners and frivolities take precedence over ethical values.

Due to her young age, Scout is unable to realise that maybe the fact that women in Maycomb are so preoccupied with such minor and seemingly unimportant things is due to the minor roles they play in society. As in a movie, while men are always the main characters, women are the secondary characters. They are so concerned with issues that, at first sight, may appear vain and superficial because there is nothing else for them to do, and therefore, "[if] they cannot control the everyday business and legal affairs of their society, they can at least impose their code of manners and morality" (Shackelford 113). In any case, and in spite of Aunt Alexandra's disapproval, Scout is clear about her decision to remain a tomboy. She is still too young and innocent to understand how the adult world works and, oblivious to women's restraints, she wants to "become empowered with the freedoms the men in her society seem to possess without question and without resorting to trivial and superficial concerns such as wearing a dress and appearing genteel" (Shackelford 113).

THE INTERSECTION OF RACE, CLASS AND GENDER IN MAYCOMB'S FICTIONAL UNIVERSE. SCOUT FINCH, CALPURNIA AND MAYELLA EWELL: ALL DIFFERENT, ALL EQUAL

On the basis of intersectionality, a notion integrated in the theoretical framework of feminism and "coined in 1989 by professor Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics "intersect" with one another and overlap" (Coaston), Scout, Calpurnia and Mayella, although differently, are inevitably related to one another.

By contrasting these three characters with the social context in which they live and considering their race and class we should at least get some idea of "how power works in diffuse and differentiated ways through the creation and deployment of overlapping identity categories" (Cho et al. 797). A black woman, or a poor woman, do not experience life in the same way as the average middle-class white woman. It is true that, in any white supremacist patriarchy, oppression has been the norm in the lives of women for a long time, but this does not mean that all women are oppressed in the same way and to the same extent. A black woman is doubly disadvantaged and marginalised for being both black and female. As Ridgeway and Kricheli-Katz thoroughly explain,

> While both "women" and "Blacks" are stereotyped as diffusely less competent at desirable skills than are white men … In contemporary gender stereotypes, (white) "women" are now seen as similar to "men" in the softer aspects of agency associated with intellectual skills … "Blacks", however are seen as … lagging behind "whites" in intellectual skills … still likely to have to work harder to prove their underlying ability in the workplace and elsewhere than are similar white women." (310)

For all these reasons, black women's fight for equality cannot be the same as that of white women's. These two groups occupy a different position within the global racial hierarchy and while white women are only affected by gender, black women are discriminated both by sex and race.

In this sense, the concept of intersectionality draws attention to the fact that "feminism which is overly white, middle class, cis-gendered and able-bodied represents just one type of view - and doesn't reflect on the experiences of all the multi-layered facets in life that women of all backgrounds face" (Vidal). Intersectionality emerges, therefore, as an alternative to white feminism, seeking to give voice to and stand for every type of woman. Without privileging one group over another and taking into account every possible multi-layered facet and social status, the theory of intersectionality "accurately describes the way people from different backgrounds encounter the world" (Coaston).

With this idea in mind, let us focus now on Scout, Calpurnia and Mayella to see what aspects distinguish them and how these differences impact the way in which these three female characters perceive and approach life in the southern rural town of Maycomb.

SCOUT

Intersectionality in Scout's case is revealed by means of the clash between race, class and gender. As a white upper-class girl, Scout is expected to embrace the stereotypical figure of the southern belle and behave accordingly. Although at the beginning of the novel Scout's unfeminine attitude is not overtly reproved, later, as the story unfolds and she gets older, the youngest of the Finches begins to be consistently pressed to conform to the standards of womanhood. From one day to the next, nearly everyone in Maycomb has something to say about Scout's lack of femininity. They all tell them how to act, completely disregarding her will. Instead of using her nickname, Aunt Alexandra addresses Scout by the more girlish name of Jean Louise and tries to control the boys with whom she interacts. For instance, when Scout expresses her desire to invite Walter Cunningham home, Aunt Alexandra is hesitant about the idea. Scout insists by alluding to their similarities, but Aunt Alexandra cuts her off immediately:

> "Don't be silly, Jean Louise," said Aunt Alexandra. "The thing is, you can scrub Walter Cunningham till he shines, you can put him in shoes and a new suit, but he'll never be like Jem. Besides, there's a drinking streak in that family a mile wide. Finch women aren't interested in that sort of people."
>
> "Aun-ty," said Jem, "she ain't nine yet."
>
> "She may as well learn it now." (Lee 255)

Even though, as Jem properly points out, Scout is still a child, Aunt Alexandra is already preparing her for a near future, when she should become interested in boys and get ready to marry and be prepared to revolve all her life around men. According to the ideals of the 1930s, in childhood, girls were expected to light up their fathers' life, and then, once they grew up and left their parents' home, to take care of their husbands and their children; women's whole existence was conceived as completely depending on that of others.

The thing that most annoys Scout, however, is Jem's change of attitude. Initially he does not seem to mind Scout being a girl, but then, all of a sudden, he sides with his aunt in her campaign to turn Scout into a lady. In Chapter 12, Scout describes her brother's change of mindset in the following way: "Overnight, it seemed, Jem had acquired an alien set of values and was trying to impose them on me: several times he went so far as to tell me what to do. After one altercation when Jem hollered, 'It's time you started bein' a girl and acting right!' I burst into tears and fled to Calpurnia" (Lee 131). As a result of the progressive estrangement between Jem and Scout, she begins to spend more and more time with Miss Maudie, Calpurnia, and the rest of Maycomb's women. Little by little, Scout gains a new appreciation of womanhood and the adult world in general, until in the end, she does not hate women any longer. As she matures, she begins to understand what is going on around her, and so, she manages to tolerate some

of the things that she used to detest before. After the constant tugs-of-war with her aunt, a key point takes place in the story when Aunt Alexandra is hosting the ladies' reunion and Atticus interrupts to tell Calpurnia, Miss Maudie and his sister that Tom Robinson is dead. Scout notices how, leaving problems behind, Alexandra makes an effort to compose herself and go back to the diningroom as though nothing had happened in order to resume the reunion with her guests. Scout follows her and comments:

> Aunt Alexandra looked across the room at me and smiled. She looked at a tray of cookies on the table and nodded at them. I carefully picked up the tray and watched myself walk to Mrs. Merriweather. With my very best company manners, I asked her if she would have some. After all, if Aunty could be a lady at a time like this, so could I. (Lee 271)

It seems that Scout has begun to accept the role of the southern lady that she hated so much, but there is nothing in the book to let us know what will happen with Scout when the story ends. We know that she has learned to tolerate and accept femininity, but there is no clear evidence that she will eventually become a lady and renounce her gender-bending behaviour. As Nicholson points out, despite of the fact that "[t]he novel is narrated by Jean Louise Finch … from the perspective of an adult remembering events from her own childhood" (Nicholson 66), it is "in the tension between what Scout saw as a child and what she understands as a remembering adult, [that] we are able to follow the steps of her development from innocence to maturity" (Nicholson 66). And, according to Shackelford, although at the end of the novel Scout continues to be a child (she is a nine-year-old girl), "the book makes it clear that the adult Scout, who narrates the novel and who has presumably now assumed the feminine name Jean Louise for good, is still ambivalent at best concerning the traditional Southern lady" (Shackelford 111-112).

CALPURNIA.

Calpurnia's situation is even more complex than Scout's, since she "experience[s] color and sexual discrimination simultaneously" (Warren 18). It is important to note that privilege and discrimination do not depend exclusively on race or skin colour, for as Ava Vidal explains in one of her newspaper articles, "You can be privileged because of your class, educational background, religious background, the fact that you're able bodied or cis-gendered. A lot of black women can and do have privileges too." However, this is certainly not the case of Calpurnia or of any black woman in the America of the 1930s.

Being a woman was not easy, but being poor and black in a white community made things still more difficult. Concerning American society, Patricia H. Collins, claims that "[t]aken together, the supposedly seamless web of economy, polity, and ideology function as a highly effective system of social control designed to keep African-American women in an assigned, subordinate place … and to protect elite White male interests and worldviews" (Collins 5).

The defeat of the Confederates in the Civil War, followed by the abolition of slavery in 1865, was an open wound for many southerners still in the 1930's, both in real life and in fiction, so the overall picture of Maycomb's society did not look good for Atticus's housekeeper. In Chapter 12, she talks to the children about her past and leads them to believe that her life has been always linked to the Finch family. When Jem asks her if she was from Finch's Landing, Calpurnia replies: "'I certainly am, Mister Jem. Grew up down there between the Buford Place and the Landin'. I've spent all my days workin' for the Finches or the Bufords, an' I moved to Maycomb when your daddy and your mamma married'" (Lee 142). Although she does not say so, it is likely that she was

bought as slave, for Finch's Landing was a cotton plantation that had first belonged to the Finches' ancestor Simon Finch, who owned slaves.[14]

Calpurnia moves between blacks and whites, trying to remain neutral and adapting to each group according to the situation. This is why Scout finds it odd that she speaks and behaves differently when she adresses black people:

> That Calpurnia led a modest double life never dawned on me. The idea that she had a separate existence outside our household was a novel one, to say nothing of her having command of two languages.
>
> "Cal," I asked, "why do you talk nigger-talk to the—to your folks when you know it's not right?"
>
> "Well, in the first place I'm black—"
>
> "That doesn't mean you hafta talk that way when you know better," said Jem.
>
> … "It's not necessary to tell all you know … [F]olks don't like to have somebody around knowin' more than they do. It -aggravates 'em. You're not gonna change any of them by talkin' right, they've got to want to learn themselves, and when they don't want to learn there's nothing you can do but keep your mouth shut or talk their language." (Lee 142-143)

Scout does not seem to consider Calpurnia a black person. She obviously is, but she is different. Although she is a child, Scout is already familiar with the stereotypes about Negroes circulating in Maycomb. And yet, she is not able to associate Calpurnia

[14] In the first chapter of the novel, as she recalls what she has been told about her oldest ancestor, Scout narrates: "So Simon, having forgotten his teacher's dictum on the possession of human chattels, bought three slaves and with their aid established a homestead on the banks of the Alabama River some forty miles above Saint Stephens" (Lee 4).

with the stereotypical image of the Negro that she knows so well. More than a cook and a housekeeper, Calpurnia functions as one of Scout's several mother figures. She is there to fill the void that the siblings' mother left after her death and to guide Scout through life, which might be one of the reasons why Scout is unable to identify Calpurnia with the rest of black women. Moreover, in relation to her education, Scout comments: "When in tranquility, her grammar was as good as anybody's in Maycomb. Atticus said Calpurnia had more education than most colored folks" (Lee 27). The fact that, unlike her, most Negroes were illiterate was probably the thing that most surprised Scout. In Chapter 12, when Jem and Scout go with Calpurnia to First Purchase (her church), she reveals to the children that she is one of the four Negroes in there who can read (140-141), and given that there was no school for black people, she decided to take the initiative to educate her eldest son Zeebo:

> " … Cal, did you teach Zeebo?"
>
> "Yeah, Mister Jem. There wasn't a school even when he was a boy. I made him learn, though." (Lee 142)

Calpurnia's efforts to educate herself and her children demonstrate her refusal to submit to societal discriminatory and racial codes, at least to some extent, because she is aware of her subordinate condition within society and does not complain when Aunt Alexandra or any other white person refers to her in a contemptuous manner. In Chapter 16, Atticus and his sister have an argument because he had said that Braxton Underwood despised Negroes in front of Calpurnia and Alexandra did not consider it right to speak like that in front of black people. Atticus, however, states:

> "Anything fit to say at the table's fit to say in front of Calpurnia. She knows what she means to this family."

> "I don't think it's a good habit, Atticus. It encourages them. You know how they talk among themselves. Everything that happens in this town's out to the Quarters before sundown." (Lee 178)

Calpurnia's literacy is seen among the other black women as if she was putting on airs, as if she deemed herself superior to the rest. This is why Lula, one of the black women who were in First Purchase Church, does not hesitate to put her in her place by reminding her that she is no better than the rest:

> "I wants to know why you bringin' white chillun to nigger church."
>
> "They's my comp'ny," said Calpurnia. Again I thought her voice strange: she was talking like the rest of them.
>
> "Yeah, an' I reckon you's comp'ny at the Finch house durin' the week." (Lee 135)

By telling this to Calpurnia, she is giving her a reminder that the Finches are not her family, but her employers; that the white kids with whom she arrives at the church are not her children; and that no matter what she believes or what they make her think, Atticus, Jem and Scout are not her equals.

MAYELLA.

Like Scout, Mayella has also lost her mother, but this is just one similarity against the many differences that separate the two girls. Mayella is a Ewell, and the Ewells were regarded by Maycomb's people as white trash. Scout's racist comment in Chapter 17, makes it clear that all they had "that made [them] any better than [their] nearest neighbors was, that if scrubbed with lye soap in very hot water, [their] skin was white" (Lee 195).

The day of Tom Robinson's trial, Atticus asks Mayella a series of questions intending to present Ewells' lifestyle before the audience. Thanks to his intervention,

> The jury learned the following things: their relief check was far from enough to feed the family, and there was strong suspicion that Papa drank it up anyway … ; … if you wanted to wash you hauled your own water; the younger children had perpetual colds and suffered from chronic ground-itch; there was a lady who came around sometimes and asked Mayella why she didn't stay in school—she wrote down the answer; with two members of the family reading and writing, there was no need for the rest of them to learn—Papa needed them at home. (Lee 208)

Mayella could probably have been the perfect embodiment of the southern belle, but she had been born a Ewell and she could do nothing about it. Unlike her father and her siblings, "Mayella looked as if she tried to keep clean … " (Lee 203) and, to the neighbours' amazement, she took good care of six jars of beautiful red geraniums which contrasted sharply with the surroundings of the dirty place in which the Ewells lived (Lee 194), suggesting her longing for a different, better life far from the label of white trash that situated her and her family at the bottom of the hierarchy (only above the Negroes).

She accused Tom Robinson of raping her and beating her. During the trial, Atticus urges her to tell the truth and asks her: "'What did your father see in the window, the crime of rape or the best defense to it? …'" (Lee 213). Scared and offended, Mayella replies:

> "I got somethin' to say an' then I ain't gonna say no more. That nigger yonder took advantage of me an' if you fine fancy gentlemen don't wanta do nothin' about it then you're all yellow stinkin' cowards, stinkin' cowards, the lot of you. Your

> fancy airs don't come to nothin'— your ma'amin' and Miss Mayellerin' don't come to nothin', Mr. Finch—" (Lee 213-214)

Appealing to the conventional ideas of men as protectors of women, she victimises herself in order to avoid criticism by Maycomb's people. Showing herself as the damsel in distress, the men in the jury had no other choice but to believe her and put the blame on the black man who had dared to injure a helpless nineteen-year-old girl white. She was a victim, indeed, but not of Tom Robinson but of her own father who beat her. In his speech at the end of Chapter 20, Atticus states:

> "I have nothing but pity in my heart for the chief witness for the state, but my pity does not extend so far as to her putting a man's life at stake, which she has done in an effort to get rid of her own guilt.
>
> " … She has committed no crime, she has merely broken a rigid and time-honored code of our society ... She is the victim of cruel poverty and ignorance, but I cannot pity her: she is white. She knew full well the enormity of her offense, but because her desires were stronger than the code she was breaking, she persisted in breaking it … [and] she tried to put the evidence of her offense away from her. (Lee 231)

Knowing what would happen if people found out that she had been the one who had kissed and tempted Tom, Mayella decides to falsely accuse him of rape. She was scared; afraid of her white neighbours' reaction and terrified of her father, who according to Tom, after he had discovered them together had yelled: "you goddamn whore, I'll kill ya" (Lee 221). After listening to Bob Ewell's, Mayellas's, and Tom Robinson's testimonies, Scout concluded that

> … Mayella Ewell must have been the loneliest person in the world … When Atticus asked had she any friends, she seemed not to know what he meant, then

> she thought he was making fun of her. She was as sad … as what Jem called a mixed child: white people wouldn't have anything to do with her because she lived among pigs; Negroes wouldn't have anything to do with her because she was white … Tom Robinson was probably the only person who was ever decent to her. But she said he took advantage of her, and when she stood up she looked at him as if he were dirt beneath her feet. (Lee 218)

Scout's reflection perfectly describes Mayella's situation: she was rejected and discriminated because of her low position in society (she was nothing more than white trash), of her skin colour (being white, black people did not want to be involved with her) and of her gender (her father beat her).

It is worth noting the pressure that women are under from their very childhood. Girls are instructed to conform to society's expectations since they are children. There is a point in the novel (in Chapter 12) where Scout is observing Calpurnia and thinks of womanhood as if it were some kind of art: "by watching her I began to think there was some skill involved in being a girl" (Lee 132). Actually, there is. Calpurnia struggles to move among the two racial groups without disappointing anyone; Mayella has just learned what happens when she defies racial codes and her father's patriarchal authority; and Scout tries to stay true to herself in a world that pushes her to change and surrender to the ideas of femininity prevalent in her society. Though different from each other, the three are discriminated on the same grounds. On one side, Scout and Calpurnia stand together in the fight for self-determination, and on the other, Mayella secretly dreams of becoming a southern belle, struggling against the social background in which she has been born.

CONCLUSIONS

The comparison between Harper Lee's novel and Robert Mulligan's film version shows that the process of adaptation is much more complex than what it may seem at first sight. In order to move from one medium to another, changes are inevitable, which makes film adaptation a complex work.

How to transform a literary story into a visual one? Should the film adaptation be faithful to the novel on which it is based and what does fidelity consist of? We have seen that the issue of fidelity is a tricky one. There are different types of fidelity (to the theme, to the characters…) but we should not forget that the film, as an adaptation, cannot be (and should not be) an exact copy of the source text. The film *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s is no longer Harper Lee's work, but Robert Mulligan's reinvention of Lee's novel. The concepts of intertextuality and intermediality emerge as two possible alternatives to the concept of fidelity.

Regarding *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s contextualisation, Scout's coming-of-age story takes place in the 1930s, during the Great Depression. We have seen how Scout, Calpurnia, and Mayella strive to move forward in a racist, male-dominated society in which they are discriminated and relegated to a secondary role on account of three basic aspects: gender, race, and class.

Though many consider racism and Atticus' defence of Tom Robinson as the main themes of both the novel and the film, the true protagonist of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is Scout, who struggles against Maycomb's oppressive society in her determination not to become a lady. The thrust of academic criticism focuses on the analysis and study of racism and legal aspects. But Lee, like many other Southern writers, such as Flannery O'Connor and William Faulkner, did not miss the opportunity to deal with, together with racial hatred, the issues of conservatism and sexism in their works through the depiction

of a confining society. In “A Rose for Emily” and “Dry September”, Faulkner presents Emily Grierson and Minnie Cooper as the recurrent matter of debate among their neighbours. As spinters, they did not meet womanhood’s expectations, they did not fit into the standards of femininity and, as Mayella in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Minnie resorts to a lie in order to draw criticism away from herself. She accuses Will Mayes (a black man) of rape, causing a lynch mob to go after him.

In the context of Southern 1930s patriarchal society, women were under very heavy pressure. They were forced to conform to traditional gender norms and to specific feminine traits that prevented them from realising and bringing forth their true potential, their true selves. As in the case of Scout, many women were pushed to renounce to their inclinations in favour of a feminine behaviour that suited their social background.

An added problem was that of race and class. As we have seen with Calpurnia, black women were doubly or even triply disadvantaged, when they were poor and black. The struggle for justice and racial equality initiated in the late 1950s, widely known as the civil rights movement, is still ongoing in what we know today as the Black Lives Matter movement.

I would like to end by quoting some of the words King's words in his 'I have a dream' speech, a discourse that perfectly describes how delicate the situation is and how far we are still from real equality: “There are those who are asking … “When will you be satisfied?” We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality (King, “I Have a Dream”). As the recent cases of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many other black men and women evidence, a long road lies ahead before we can achieve true justice and equality.

Similarly, much work remains to be done in the years to come as regards women's situation. Many years have passed and we have not been able to get rid of gender stereotypes yet. Why do girls have to be feminine? Femininity is nothing more than a social construct. Why are women regarded as inferior to men? What is it that makes them less valuable? The fact that these questions continue to be asked in the 21st century is a sign that, in spite of the efforts, gender equality has not been achieved yet.

Hopefully, the time will come when women will not be told what they can and cannot do; when they will be free to be anything they want. Hopefully, the time will come when our voices will be finally heard.

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